



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

SHEILA SIMON – LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Illinois River Coordinating Council Quarterly Meeting

**Wednesday, April 13, 2011
Pere Marquette State Park Visitor's Center
Grafton, Illinois
1:30 PM**

MINUTES

Call to Order and Roll Call

Olivia Dorothy, Office of Lt. Governor Sheila Simon, called the meeting to order at 1:35, and welcomed members and guests to the second quarter meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Dorothy called the roll.

Citizen Members

Doug Blodgett, The Nature Conservancy; Margaret Frisbie, Friends of the Chicago River; Reggie Greenwood, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association; Daphne Mitchell; Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau; and Richard Worthen.

State Agency Members

Debbie Bruce, Department of Natural Resources; Charles Perino, Department of Transportation; Terry Weldin-Frisch, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; and Marcia Willhite, Environmental Protection Agency.

Ex-Officio Members

Lee Albright, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Nani Bhowmik, Science Advisory Committee; Vera Bojic, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center; Coleen Callahan, US Department of Agriculture, Rural Development; Louise Clemency, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Tim Henry, US Environmental Protection Agency; Brian Johnson, US Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District; Don King, US Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency; Marshall Plumley, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District; and Doug Yeskis, US Geological Survey.

Absent Members

Lee Bunting, Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Illinois Department of Agriculture; US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District; US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service; and US Coast Guard.

Approval of Minutes

Richard Worthen moved to approve the minutes from March 16, 2011. Debbie Bruce seconded. Minutes approved unanimously with no corrections.

Chairman's Remarks

Since the March 16, 2011 meeting, the Lt. Governor sent two letters to support the Ramsar designation for Emiquon and encourage Congress to adequately fund the Water Resources Development Act.

Dorothy stated that during this administration, the IRCC will review the Integrated Management Plan (IMP). The Council will look at progress to date and discuss future actions. There are lots of great programs on the ground that the Council has helped to initiate since the creation of the IMP fifteen years ago. The first step is complete a brief review of progress towards the measurable outcomes.

The IMP has seven measurable outcomes and some may have already been met, but no one has reviewed them. Seven ad-hoc committees of the Council will review the state of knowledge on progress towards those measurable outcomes. Committees will draft a report and present their findings to the Council and public at the October 4, 2011 meeting. Then the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) will review the entire IMP and evaluate the progress towards the stated goals, objectives and tactics. When the Council has reviewed the IMP, depending on the results of the analysis, the Lt. Governor, with the Council, may revise the plan and the outcomes to reflect current information.

Plumley will work with the Corps to crosswalk the goals and objectives of the IMP with the Comprehensive Plan for the Illinois River to provide additional background.

Bruce requested letters be sent to agency heads regarding the assignment. Dorothy responded that Lt. Governor Simon would accommodate this request.

Member Comment Period

Blodgett invited everyone to the opening of the visitor use facilities at Emiquon on June 4 at 11:00 AM. The facilities help the public understand the history of the area.

Greenwood commented that the Corps needs to dredge the Calumet River in the next 3 to 5 years. They have initiated a study on disposal of sediment. He is reviewing whether Lake Riverdale is an option.

Frisbie announced that the Chicago River Summit would be held May 13th at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. Chicago River Day clean-up is May 14th. They will have 4,000 volunteers at 60 locations doing river restoration projects and cleaning up the river. The Bridgehouse Museum opens on May 15th. It is a seasonal museum in Chicago that tells the story of the river and celebrates its connection to the region. It's Our River Day will be on the North Branch of the Chicago River in September.

Dorothy recognized Dr. Dale Chapman, President of Lewis and Clark Community College and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC). The SAC will be re-established within NGRREC. Chapman has agreed to provide administrative support for the SAC, which Nani Bhowmik will continue to chair. The SAC will expand its role from just the IRCC and to provide advice to all three Coordinating Councils. Chapman added that they are excited to reinvigorate the SAC.

Illinois River Restoration Projects – Eric Schenck, Regional Biologist, Ducks Unlimited

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is a steward of North American waterfowl and next year they will celebrate their 75th anniversary. DU was established in 1937 in response to widespread concern among sportsmen about the impact of the Dust Bowl on continental waterfowl populations. The organization was modeled after Teddy Roosevelt's sportsmen as conservationists. The sportsmen formed the organization and raised money. Initially, DU focused on Canada to try to drought-proof the prairies of Canada. For the last 75 years, the organization has focused on the mission to ensure North American waterfowl and the habitats they depend on are conserved in perpetuity.

During this time, habitats have had mixed story. In the case of the Illinois River, the spring habitat has become more stable, but in the fall there has been a seriously downward trend. Some species, like mallards, have declined in population by two-thirds in terms of their use of the Illinois River in the fall since the 1940s and 1950s. Blue bills and diving ducks have seen a 90% decline. DU's belief is that this trend can and should be reversed through strategic conservation measures designed to increase the quality and quantity of wetland habitat in the Illinois River valley.

Over the past decade, DU has focused its attention on three conservation strategies: Improving the quality of wetland habitat on existing federal or state conservation areas by enhancing water management capabilities; acquiring and restoring habitat on parcels of land adjacent to existing federal or state conservation areas; and working with private duck clubs, farmers and other landowners to provide technical assistance, and sometimes cost-share assistance, to encourage adoption of wetland conservation practices. During this period of time, DU has managed to directly acquire or protect 2,200 acres of high priority wetland habitat along the Illinois River in fee titles or conservation easements. They have also worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service and Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to help them acquire land through financial contributions. On top of that they have restored or enhanced another 5,000 acres of wetland habitat in partnership with other public or private landowners. This represents an investment of nearly \$1 million each year in wetland conservation. Over the next five years, DU hopes to double down its conservation investments and efforts in the Illinois River region and create a \$10 million partnership program.

In looking at the IMP, and having observed over the last ten years or so, the IRCC covers a broad array of topics. DU hopes that the IRCC can focus and bring people together to make big commitments. It is possible in the next four years to create larger conservation success stories with focus and collaboration.

Restoration Projects in Construction Phase – Marshall Plumley, USACE, Rock Island District

The Rice Lake Project is being conducted under the Environmental Management Program authority with IDNR. The project is 25 miles south of Peoria and is a 7,000 acre backwater lake complex. The Illinois River hydrology has become increasingly unstable in the summertime. This reduces the ability of the lake complex to support proper vegetation for waterfowl and other species. The purpose of this project is to be able to manage these water levels to the benefit of the plant and wildlife communities at the site. This will be accomplished by rehabilitating an existing levee and constructing many smaller levees inside the site. Construction should be initiated by the end of the year.

Terry Ingram, Eagle Nature Foundation, expressed concern that there have not been sufficient public hearings. Plumley responded there was a public hearing in January 2010 and that record will be online. Ingram responded that the biologists did not have enough information then to discuss damage to an eagle roost. Plumley will work with the Corps personnel to respond to Ingram's concerns.

Dr. Paige Mettler-Cherry, Lindenwood University, asked if there was a study done on the impact of the *B. decurrens* population at Rice Lake. Plumley responded that he will follow up with those details.

A number of projects in the Illinois River Basin Program, Section 519, could go to construction next year. Pekin Lake Southern Unit and Alton Pool Side Channels likely will be approved. Peoria Upper Island, a 21 acre island with 50 acres of restored aquatic habitat, is in construction. It has been in construction for two years, and will likely be completed this season. The Waubonsie Creek project was completed.

Worthen confirmed \$425,000 was appropriated for Section 519 in FY 2011. Plumley responded that FY12 has another \$400,000 for investigation.

Dick Ladzinski asked if there were any plans for the Starved Rock dam and the lake behind it because there used to be significant vegetation there, but it is all gone now, and cannot be used as a nesting place for waterfowl. Plumley responded they are studying alternatives to reestablish vegetation.

Bhowmik asked if they were doing any hydraulic monitoring at Waubansie Creek. Plumley responded he would follow up with that information.

Illinois River System Stream and Watershed Assessments – Bill White, Illinois State Water Survey

Erosion is natural in the Illinois River watershed due to the geologic history, but current rates are not sustainable. Illinois State Water Survey (ISWS) projects focus on stabilizing tributary streams and backwater lakes. A lot of the tributary streams have steep slopes and are the most critical sources of sediment per unit area. Most erosion in the region is caused by channel down-cutting, not lateral migration. That is really bad for bridges, roads, and railroads.

Most projects focus on watersheds that are draining in the Peoria Pool and upstream. ISWS strives to reduce sediment delivery, increase the base flows in the summer, and decrease peak discharge from these tributaries. To decide which watersheds to assess, ISWS collects information and data on biologically significant and resource rich areas, and reviews the status of watershed plans in the area.

ISWS has assessed Park Ridge Creek, Ten Mile Creek, and Senachwine Creek. Once the Corps completes reconnaissance level studies ISWS looks at everything on a more focused scale for construction projects. Project cost can range dramatically and many needed projects become too expensive to implement. ISWS designs in-stream structures to protect the systems by evaluating channel stability ranking, biological habitat, and geologic evolution. Riffle structures are the most successful and do not have high maintenance expenses.

The selection process to prioritize watershed reviews needs modification to implement cost-effective protocols. There are a lot of restoration techniques available and ISWS will continue to improve protocols and projects.

Bruce asked where the watershed reports can be found. White will distribute them.

Worthen asked if IDNR has funded these studies. White responded that IDNR has funded all but three of the watersheds assessed for the Illinois River Comprehensive Restoration Plan (Comp Plan).

King commented that the US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) has a new program for wetlands construction to reduce nutrient loading and sediment runoff. Farmable Wetlands Program (CP39) allocates funds for 5,000 acres of wetland construction on private land. CP39 can be implemented on any area to not impact agricultural production. The USDA pays 90% of the installation costs and makes an annual payment for 10 years. FSA needs help promoting the program in Illinois.

Bruce moved to host a meeting between the ISWS, IDNR, FSA, Corps and Illinois Farm Bureau to look at areas identified for wetlands in White's studies and see where they can implement CP39 to address the goals of the IMP and Comp Plan, then report back in September. Worthen seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Anyone interested in participating should contact Dorothy.

Re-establishing the Science Advisory Committee, Illinois River Team & Illinois River Work Group – Olivia Dorothy, Lt. Governor’s Office

Two subcommittees for the IRCC were established in 2008 to work within the Corps framework, the Illinois River Team (IRT) and the Illinois River Work Group (IRWG). To ensure the subcommittees’ effectiveness, the IRCC includes Corps updates at each IRCC meeting and IRCC representatives attend River Resources Coordination Team (RRCT), River Resources Action Team (RRAT), and Upper Mississippi River Basin Association meetings as allowable under potential budgetary constraints. After the Lt. Governor’s Office was vacated, most of these subcommittees came to a halt. Before the impeachment, the IRCC encouraged IDNR to fill a vacant seat on the RRAT Executive Team, and requested the SAC to identify and send a member to the NESP Science Panel neither of these actions were accomplished. These subcommittees will be reinvigorated in the framework that was established in 2008.

The IRWG was created to develop river reach objectives and plans, and review Corps products. The Group will ensure increased communication and coordination and is open to all agencies, organizations, and stakeholders. IRWG will be co-chaired by Corps, IDNR and IRCC. The IRWG is the technical group for implementation of the Illinois River Basin Restoration. This group has developed the Illinois River Reach objectives and project evaluation matrix. They identified 27 new projects for the Illinois River Reach in addition to 6 critical restoration projects for Section 519 that are in the Main Stem of the River.

Blodgett will serve as the Citizen Member Chair of the IRWG. Meetings will be held in Springfield and, with the SAC, to refine project ranking criteria and present that to the IRCC first quarter 2012.

Plumley asked if they intend to prioritize the remaining projects for Corps purposes or for a broader funding mechanism. Because when they started a Reach planning process in 2009, the Corps laid out all the projects under the various programs, which totaled to \$150 million. The Corps only gets approximately \$20 million a year across all 5 states. Bruce responded that it will assist the prioritization upon the Corps request, but the IRWG will review other projects for broader funding mechanisms.

Blodgett commented that the IRWG is developing the prioritization method and then handing off the actual prioritizing to the IRT. Bruce added that IRWG develops criteria based on science and research then passes it to the IRT who will consider other factors before presenting to the IRCC for approval.

The IRT was created to serve as the river reach team on equal footing with the RRCT and RRAT and to review language in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), current Corps policies, authorities and legal agreements to verify that the IRT activities are supported by Congress and the Corps. The Team will also be charged with drafting and pursuing necessary changes to WRDA if actions warrant. The Team will be co-chaired by the Corps and the IRCC.

The IRT is composed of one representative from the following 12 agencies: Corps – Rock Island, Corps – St. Louis, Corps – Chicago, US Coast Guard, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, FSA, IDNR, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Transportation, and Illinois Department of Agriculture. The Lt. Governor will also make six citizen appointments to the IRT.

The IRT needs to review existing charters of other river teams and propose charter for IRT. They should prioritize the entire list of Illinois River restoration projects, including the Corps list of 27 new projects and the critical restoration project. Three Regional Teams need to be established for the Lower, Middle,

and Upper Illinois River. Lastly, the IRT must continue to encourage the Corps to move Section 519 projects to Environmental Management Program or Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program should construction funds become available before 519 funding.

The IRT will begin work soon. Dick Worthen will serve as the IRCC Citizen Member Chair and meetings will commence in Springfield. The IRT will have a working relationship with the SAC on river related issues including research, data collection and monitoring. By first quarter 2012, the IRT will prioritize the list of Illinois River Restoration projects, develop charter and goals and objectives for IRT, and begin work to establish the three Regional Teams.

White asked if groups who were previously representation on the IRT could assign anyone to the River Team. Dorothy stated that the Lt. Governor's Office will need to develop a new appointment process and recommendations for the IRT should be sent to Dorothy.

Plumley passed around a handout concerning the establishment of these teams and the Corps. The Corps has been very program or project focused. At the request of the state and given the Corps desire to cooperate more fully with their partners and the public they developed the new structure for the IRT and IRWG to meet various needs. When agreement was made in 2009 on the new structure, they operated under this organization structure for some REACH planning activities on the Illinois throughout 2009 and 2010. Summaries of those activities are included in the packet.

Chapman asked where the RRCT and RRAT report. Plumley responded that those are advisory committees to the Corps districts. The IRCC is at the same level of the RRCT and the RRAT.

Chapman commented that there is a plan to create an alliance along the Mississippi River comparable to the Great Lakes Alliance or Chesapeake Bay Alliance in collaboration with General Walsh. There is no comprehensive sustainability plan for the Mississippi River. NGRREC is pursuing a committee of 15 non-government organizations (NGO) to coordinate an effort as federal funding shrinks. Lewis and Clark Community College is coordinating all of the community colleges along the river to support this effort, 35 colleges have agreed to participate. Land grant colleges from the upper and middle Mississippi have all met at the Great Rivers Field Station to discuss partnering with the NGOs, Corps and community colleges. If the state commissions support the effort, it is a possibility to have a really powerful alliance.

Schenck commented that DU has participated in the working group process. It has been very Corps-centric and another group could work on non-Corps programs. There are a lot of restorations projects going on outside the federal realm. Dorothy responded that it is something to consider as the IRCC evaluates the IMP. Bruce added that there are three regional groups under the working group were intended to review all projects for both the Corps and other partners.

Worthen moved to assign Blodgett as Citizen Member Chair of the IRWG with IDNR and Corps and hold meetings to refine project ranking criteria. Perino seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Worthen moved to be appointed Citizen Member Chair of IRT and hold meetings to prioritize the list of Illinois River Restoration Projects, develop a charter and goals, and work to establish the three regional teams. Bruce seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Dorothy announced the next meeting will be September 16th at Brookfield Zoo. The meeting will focus on Illinois River education programs and how they relate to the IMP.

Erickson provided information on the Illinois River Conference Tour which will be held on the first day of the Illinois River Conference in Peoria in October. Bring your binoculars and cameras.

White added that the Governor's Conference is October 4 – 7, 2011 and the RiverWatch Symposium will take place prior to the conference.

Public Comment Period

Ingram commented that very few of the bald eagle communities are doing well, and that very few populations have plentiful immature birds. The Banner and Rice Lake roosts are going to be destroyed if the restoration project moves forward.

Adjournment

Terri Mitchell moved to adjourn the meeting. Blodgett seconded. The meeting adjourned at 3:45 PM.